

/12 cont. /

682
426 If the blood-price was not paid within a certain period, then at the end of the year, in place of a debt of four spans, five were owed, in place of five, six, and six became seven, so that an already considerable debt increased still more and weighed like a heavy burden on the shoulders of the debtor. But the Abkhaz had one excellent custom -- that of coming to the aid of an insolvent debtor. All the latter had to do was to announce that he "owed for blood," and everybody contributed his mite to pay off the debt.

796
682
608 The following ceremony was considered the best way to a complete reconciliation of the parties involved in a blood-feud. A relative of the killer gave a banquet and, through intermediaries, invited the claimant of blood himself or his son. It was sufficient to persuade the claimant of blood to touch his lips to the breast of the wife or mother of the debtor, and, as a result of this action alone, everlasting and indissoluble peace would be restored between them. If, on the other hand, the blood-avenger would not be appeased and would not come to the feast, then those acting for the other side endeavored to abduct the son or some other close relative of the claimant or in some other way get such a person into their house. If they succeeded, then peace was restored whether the avenger liked it or not, for to kill the foster father was considered a violation and desecration of the "breast" and beneath the dignity of a brave man. Love of homeland is developed to the highest degree in the Abkhaz. Some peoples say, ubi bene, ibi patria, but the Abkhaz, on the other hand, prays: "There is no better place in the world than Abkhazia. God, save Abkhazia." In both grief and happiness alike, the Abkhaz repeats this prayer.

186
574 As is the case with all ancient peoples, hospitality is piously honored and maintained in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz is convinced that every guest is accompanied by seven "baraka" (blessing, /13/ briss, abundance), one of which remains with the host, and God gives back to the guest this seventh baraka. Even the poorest Abkhaz does his utmost to treat his guest as well as possible; when an Abkhaz sees a traveler going along the village

/13 cont./

574 road in the evening, he immediately greets him, "bziala vahbeit" -- "it is good to see you!" Then he invites the traveler into his house; "Come in and rest, where are you going now? Spend the night in our house, and early in the morning go your way." If the traveler, be he an acquaintance or a stranger, accepts the invitation and puts up at the host's house, he receives a warm reception and is wonderfully well regaled. And if the traveler does not accept the invitation, he replies, "ubeikht" (grow rich, thank you) and continues on his way. The custom of hospitality protects the traveler even from blood-vengeance. Once he is someone's guest, no one has the right to touch him.

181 Along with his hospitality and generosity, the Abkhaz is
888 also courteous, polite, and respectful, especially to older persons. Here are a few examples.

515 Before taking any food the Abkhaz usually wash their hands.
576 But the washing is performed in order of seniority, the ablution
[264] of the hands beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest of those attending the banquet. The same order is observed in drinking wine. But on such occasions the oldest person does not lag behind either. In the beginning he renounces his right of priority and invites the person next in rank to drink wine or to wash his hands first. This is required by the custom of courtesy and politeness. But, of course, the younger person flatly refuses the honor offered him. Finally, after many mutual compliments and words of persuasion, the first one (the oldest) accepts the invitation after all. Then the same ceremony is gone through between the second and the third, the third and the fourth, and so on, down to the youngest person attending. Furthermore, while the oldest persons are washing their hands, the younger ones are obliged to remain standing. Here again there is ceremony, exhortations for them to sit down, but if those who are urged to do so ignore these exhortations and continue to stand, then the older person considers it improper to wash his hands sitting down, and he also stands up. The question of which of two persons shall first cross the threshold and

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/23 cont. /

584 is considered a mortal insult; /24/ in this case abduction is con-
583 sidered the only way of satisfying one's injured self-esteem. But
554 usually marriage negotiations are conducted in Abkhazia by
female matchmakers or by intermediaries. If they bring the
matter to a happy conclusion, their labors are rewarded with the
[45] heads and hides of the oxen that are butchered for the wedding.
As soon as a mutual understanding has been reached, the bride
and groom, after an exchange of presents, set a day for a meeting.

At the designated time, the groom and his friends set out,
with presents, for the house of the parents of the bride. A
[583] princely groom sometimes brings as many as 20 or 30 horses,
of which many are saddled. Now a feast is held at the groom's
● [574] expense. During the banquet the friends of the groom, on the
one hand, and those invited by the bride's parents, on the
other, try in all possible ways to outdo each other in witticisms,
puns, eloquence, in the amount of wine consumed, in singing,
etc. The next day the comrades of the groom receive various
presents and the groom himself receives a horse, or money and
arms. Then the comrades return home, while the son-in-law
remains in the house of the bride's parents with his delegate
(dade).

But the future son-in-law still feels extremely ill at ease.
According to the custom of the country, he may not yet show
himself to the parents of the bride or their relatives. He is
wrapped in a burka, and his head and face are wrapped in a
bashlyk, under which only his eyes are barely visible. On the
first night, during the feast, he hides himself somewhere out-
side and spends the night in a neighboring house. On the next
day he is forcibly taken to the bride's house. But even now he
does not dare to sit down and remains standing by the door,
leaving it to his delegate to speak for him. In general it is not
[606] proper for the young son-in-law to eat with his parents-in-law,
or sometimes even to sit down with them at the table. In
some places, husband and wife never appear together before the
wife's parents. This is considered shameful.

The bride takes up residence in a small house (amhara),

/26 cont./

602 avoids pronouncing the name of his wife. When the wife's father
[606] and mother first visit their son-in-law, he must offer them presents in the same way as when he himself with his wife first visits the wife's parents.

V.

Mourning and Burial of the Dead

758
574 In general the Abkhaz are very compassionate towards the sick and never leave alone a person who is seriously ill. When the villagers are informed that one of their number is seriously ill, all of them without fail will visit him, inquire about his illness, encourage him, and try to cheer him. The patient is visited not only by his relatives, but also by all the other villagers, irrespective of their title or means. They usually come to visit the patient in the evening and spend the whole night with him, singing, dancing, or telling stories, making jokes, etc., with the object of somehow /27/ cheering the invalid and relieving his sufferings in one way or another. The sick are treated with home remedies, old wise-women say prayers over them, etc.

763 As soon as a patient dies, the women instantly break out in deafening wails and soul-shaking screams, at the same time tearing out their hair, scratching their bodies, beating themselves on the face and head, and so on. Meanwhile the whole neighborhood gathers, and the weeping and sobbing increase. Some women closely related to the deceased begin to beat themselves, striking their heads against something or other; the others try to soothe and quiet them. But all these admonitions frequently have no effect on the frenzied mourners, who, as a result of the blows they have inflicted upon their own heads and bodies and of beating their heads against something, fall down as if dead. When quiet finally prevails, the funeral ceremony is arranged. The next of kin sew themselves mourning apparel,
[206] and messengers are sent out with notices and invitations to the relatives, foster parents, friends, and acquaintances of the deceased; his fellow villagers on the other hand are obliged

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782 On the day set for the prayer, usually at the time when
233 the herds are driven into the mountains for the summer and
796 when they return in autumn, the shepherds of the village break
up into several groups, each group choosing a pretty spot in
the forest near a brook or river. Some rams, according to the
number of participants, are slaughtered, and the oldest
shepherd of those departing for the mountains addresses Aphi, beg-
ging him to preserve them as well as their herd from the thunder-
bolts. Women and children do not dare to be present at the
prayers to Aphi, and women may not even pronounce his
name. When talking of Aphi, the Abkhaz usually say
"khakhikal" ("the one above" or "the supreme one.")

782 During a prolonged drought, a prayer with sacrifices is
731 offered in honor of Aphi. The best bull is chosen from the
789 herd and a day is set for the sacrifice. The villagers bring
gomi, bread, fresh cheese, and a jug of wine. The most
venerable old man holds a rope fastened to the horns of the
bull; removing his cap, he pronounces the following prayer,
"Oh Aphi, master of thunder, lightning, and rain! have pity
on your people. Our harvests have dried up, the grass is
withered, our livestock perishes from want of feed, and
therefore /51/ death from hunger threatens us. Command the
rain-clouds to gather, command the thunder to peal, the
lightning to flash, and send us rain to save the perishing
people." The participants say "Amen," and the sacrificial
animal is killed and its meat cooked. After all the dishes,
made from ingredients brought with him, have been pre-
pared and laid out on mats, the old man who said the prayer
repeats it, and then, with the singing of a hymn in praise of
Aphi, the feast begins. This hymn is called Anchva rysshva
and is sung in honor of Aphi, not only at feasts, but also
[821] during thunderstorms. In the first instance, it is sung with
thankfulness for the gifts that are enjoyed, in the second,
to move Aphi to send good weather. During the feasts, one
of the elders usually addresses a speech to those present, re-
minding them that all they are then enjoying comes with the
blessing of Aphi and suggesting that they thank him. Then

/51 cont. /

782 one of those present begins to glorify the god: "Anchva
731 dukhva zlyphkha khkhaura!" "O you who descends from
574 heaven with lightning and ascend to heaven with thunder,
who knows the number of the stars in heaven and of the
sands at the bottom of the sea . ." etc., and he concludes
the poem with the words, "akh dau." All those present,
divided into two groups, repeat every line of the hymn in
turn, always three times over.

782 The killing of one of the herd by lightning unfailingly
821 evokes prayer to Aphi; on the other hand, if he is not ap-
peased by sacrifice, a repetition of his visit must be expected.
The owner of the dead animal invites the inhabitants of the
village, without distinction as to age or sex. On the spot
where the animal was killed, a tower is built about one and
a half sagene in height, so that beasts of prey cannot climb
it. All those present surround the killed animal, join hands,
and dance, half of them singing "Voetla" and the other half
answering "Chaupar," and they raise the animal onto the
tower, still singing and dancing, and leave it there as a
victim for the birds of prey. Then the owner of the animal
killed by lightning sacrifices a bull to Aphi, at the same
time thanking him for the present visit and begging him
nonetheless to spare him future visits. Various dishes are
prepared from the meat of the sacrificed animal; bread,
cheese, and wine are brought, and those present feast all day
long at the expense of the man who suffered the loss. The
day the animal was killed by lightning becomes so memorable
in the family that has thus been visited by Aphi that
[527] neither the head of the family /52/ nor his children will give
[431] anyone anything on the anniversary of that day, saying
that they expect a visit from Aphi on that day.

[766] The same ceremony is performed when a person has
been struck by lightning. During the dance around the corpse,
none of the relatives of the dead man dares to weep; other-
wise all the participants will be struck dead by a thunder-bolt.

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thy heart! Grant us such a crop of maize that at its gathering we shall have to bend the stalks with a hook (Geo. *Kavi*), and cut them down with a bill!" *K'uarpa* (*a-k'warpa*) is then spilled, and the cattle is called by shouting *wootsu*. *Andp'a-ndga* is the harvest god. In my opinion the etymology of these words is as follows: *Ap'arā* denotes "to twist or twine" something (a rope, for example), as well as "to pass with difficulty through something", for instance, a maize or millet field, crowd, etc.; *ndgara*—to carry: *inap'do indga*—carriest thou by forcing thy way, by pushing asunder.

There is also an evil spirit of the harvest called *Jaja*, but we will speak of her (she is a goddess) separately, as she is not a member of this septenary.

(g) *Atchshē-shyashyāna* (god of horses).

Finally, the supplicant takes the cake whose shape represents a horse (or three *a-hhacazhwa*), and entreats (the god) *Atchshē-shyashyāna*—the great part of the great god *Ayt'ar*, to increase his horses (donkeys and asses). Again *wootsu* and *ak'warpa*. The word *atchshē* denotes horse; *shyashyāna* or *shashana* is incomprehensible.

With this ceremonial *Ayt'ar-nōhwa* ends.

Judging from what has already been said above, it is clear that *Ayt'ar* is the head of a whole pleiade of gods, each of whom constitute a special part of him; it is noteworthy that in every supplication addressed to any one of these gods, *Ayt'ar* is also invariably referred to as one whose part is the deity in question. The religio-philosophical mind of the Abkhasians has arranged the hierarchy of these gods in the following order:—

AYT'AR: JABRĀN, ZHWABRĀN, ALĀSHKINTĒ, ĀMZA, ĀMRA, ANĀP'A-NĀGA; AND *ATCHSHĒ-SHYASHYĀNA*.

Ayt'ar is one in seven parts. This conception of God in parts is prominently expressed in *Ayt'ar*.

(h) *Lēmīlāh* (*Nēmīrāh* or *Shēmīrāh*).

Ayt'ar-nōhwa ends with *Lēmīlāh*. What this word denotes is difficult to explain. It appears to denote the god of conjugal happiness of the youth.

On the same evening, after the conclusion of *Ayt'ar-nōhwa*, the young people, boys and girls, meet at one of their houses, and begin to predict their fortunes. It is a time of laughter and gaiety, and the young people enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. *A-kwakwār* of usual size is prepared in great quantities; and also enough of a smaller size, extremely salt in flavour, to enable each participant to have three. In one of these small *akwakwār* is placed a hazel chip, called *anasp'adsw*, "stake of happiness." Each person is given three

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[574] small salt *akwakvdr*. They then go out into the garden and eat their scones in silence in the dark, at the same time entreating *Lmilak* to bestow upon them a happy married life. Whoever finds the "stake of happiness" in his or her scone must celebrate this stroke of luck by giving a party for all the participants. On the following day the *Lmilak* party is given at the house of the lucky one. After consuming the little *akwakvdr* all go back into the house and sit down to a supper which is also an occasion for gaiety. In order to maintain the feeling of thirst at its strongest, no one is allowed to drink anything. The Abkhassians believe that the thirsty person will be given a drink by the one with whom he or she is fated to share conjugal life. In such manner do the young people of Abkhassia tell their fortunes.¹

II. *AMSHAP'*

194
[24] In this chapter I have collected together all those rites grouped around the festival of Easter, called in Abkhassian *Amshap'*.² The *Amshap'* celebrations began³ two weeks before Easter Sunday, and continued for exactly three weeks, during which time custom forbade working in the field, except in the cotton field and the kitchen garden. On Sunday, two weeks before Easter Day, the Abkhassians decorated their houses with the first spring flowers, and this Sunday is called *aioba*, which is derived, probably, from the Megrelian *aia*, violet. 194
[50] Until *aioba*, playing football or other games was forbidden. After that day, however, seasonal games were in full swing. Dressed in their finest attire, the whole population gave themselves up to public sports. Among the most popular pastimes were football, wrestling, stone throwing, trick-riding, dancing, singing, and *akvabir* (in Geo. *riktap'ela*, "game of skittles," according to Tchubinashvili's or Tchubinov's Dictionary).

The following Sunday—Palm Sunday—the Abkhassians call *baioa* (a "Megrelianization"). The name is derived from *a-baia*, a 197
[137] yellow flower which grows profusely in the fields of Abkhassia in the early spring.⁴ On this day also the Abkhassians decorated their houses with flowers, particularly with *abala*.

[71] ¹ *Anasp'a dsw* has its double in Guria and Imeret'i *badis-kveri*, cracknel of fate, which is known also to the Tiflis Armenians. I think the Pshav *dsadola* arose on this ground.

[92] ² It is, in my opinion, a compound word, consisting of *amsh*, day, and *ap'* (*yap'u*), accepted, appointed, fixed; *Amshap'* thus denotes "pre-ordained day" (Geo. *mighebuli dge*).

[118] ³ These celebrations are no longer observed; they are traditional, and I am describing them from memory, or from the words of the Commission.

⁴ According to Tchubinashvili (Tchubinov), and to R. Erist'avi (Eristov), *baia* is crows-foot, *rannunculus*. Erist'avi, considering the word to be Megrelo-Imero-Gerian, gives as its K'art'(I)lian equivalent *tskhviris-salekhela*. The word *a-bala*, in Abkhassian *a-marcha*, is, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, the equivalent of the Russian *lyutik tschi*.